

# Soap

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## Pauline in Bērzpils

The ratio is about 20 kg meat trimmings to 1 kg lye. The fat from guts, old meat, inedible meat or the meat of animals which have died can be used.

Cook the trimmings and fat until it is rendered. Then add water. You can use water right from the start if there is less fat in the meat. When almost all the fat has been rendered, add a quarter of the lye. Keep on cooking the meat, adding the rest of the lye as needed by pouring in another quarter, after having boiled it for at least half an hour. If you add too much lye, the soap will be grainy, if too little, it has to be cooked a long time and the soap will be very soft. That's also true if you have to use a lot of water. For 5 kg of guts, you use 10-15 l of water. Meat with a lot of fat needs more lye, lean meat less.

If the soap becomes grainy while boiling, you have to add more water and boil it longer.

While the soap is boiling, you have to mix it with a wooden paddle so it doesn't stick to the pot. It has to be mixed more at the end of the process. You mix it round and round.

When the soap is ready, a drop at the end of your mixing paddle will congeal. After you boil it, you leave it in the pot for about 10 minutes so that the waste sinks to the bottom, and then pour it into shallow pans. The cooled soap is cut with a special thin wooden knife. Then you dry the pieces in a warm, drafty place.

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## Marta in Ārciems

Lye was needed for washing wooden dishes and laundry, as well as for making soap.

Strong lye was made from the ashes of green alder and green birch branches. For making soap, the ashes of ash trees are especially strong.

The ashes were sifted through a sieve, put in a pot and boiled. Then they were poured in a large barrel and cold water was poured over them. Eight pails of water were poured over one pail of ashes. After a few hours, it was stirred and again allowed to settle. Then it was stirred again, allowed to settle, and this liquid was poured on new ashes in a pot, boiled and allowed to settle. A raw potato or a raw egg was put in it, and if they floated, the lye was strong enough – or if it nipped the tip of your fingers.

If the ashes weren't strong enough, then a scoop of lime was thrown in when the mixture was allowed to settle, after that it was boiled. Then it gets really hard, strong, eats your hands.

They put resin in soap. They melted spruce resin.

For ten pounds of insides – one litre of lye. If it eats it away too fast and gets dark, then they added about a litre of water.

Soap was cooked from calf, sheep or pig insides.

*(Material from the Ethnographic Materials Repository of the History Institute of Latvia University)*



## Vallija in Jūrkalne

**Do you remember, did your mother make soap?**

Yes, she did! We still got soap up in the room. Yes, there's soap still there.

**Home made?**

Yes! Home made soap there!

**So how was it made?**

Well, it was boiled from a hog, that was butchered. Then there was all that stuff you don't eat. From calf, from cows, that stuff. They cooked it together, and then there was that caustic soda (sodium hydroxide). They put that in and that way boiled it, and then cooled it, and that was that soap.

**How long did they boil it?**

Oh, I don't know exactly, but a pretty long time.

*(The conversation continues in the attic, where Vallija finds some home-made soap)*

Yes, this here! It's got old.

**Has any of the caustic soda been saved?**

No, there's no more of that. Oh, these are them (soap), but they're already old, it's already white. But this is it, for sure. The case's preserved, but it's awful old. Just think, from the times of Ulmanis!\*

*(\*Latvia's president in the 1930's and 1940's).*



**Think about it, how old could the soap be now?**

Well, boiled forty years ago. How long is that? Well, boiled in the times of Ulmanis.

**How often did they boil this kind? Once a year?**

No.

**More often?**

Well, when they slaughtered hogs, they boiled it. Those days they slaughtered the hogs oftener.

**What did they wash with these – clothes?**

Washed everything! Everything, washed laundry. Made lye from ashes.

**And they put that in it?**

Yeah. Washed clothes – put ashes in the sieve and ran out lye.

**Could you use that liquid in place of caustic soda?**

Yeah, you could. That boiled concoction was added.

**If you didn't have caustic soda?**

Yeah, if you got no caustic soda. Then they'd boil a strong lot of lye and put it in.

*(Fragment of an interview in Jūrkalne)*

**If you have stories or recipes of your own about making soap or distilling moonshine which you would like to save for future generations, send it to: Serde, Atmodas iela 9, Aipute, LV-3456**

This publication was prepared by  
Signe Pucena, Ieva Vītola, Uģis Pucens, Ināra Dinne  
The Interdisciplinary art group SERDE



www.serde.lv

Workshops of intangible cultural  
heritage – moonshine, beer and  
soap making, in the residencies  
and workshops centre SERDE.  
Aizpute, Atmodas street 9.

Phone +371 29817180;  
e-mail: smg.serde@gmail.com

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# Moonshine

The moonshine workshop is an artistic interpretation about making strong drink at home.



The necessary ingredients and equipment for making "bowl vodka".



Put a pot on the stove, put in a base on which to set the bowl (stainless steel or enameled) and pour in the ferment.



Place a metal bowl in the pot (stainless steel or enameled).



Place another bowl on the pot in place of the lid. Make sure it fits well around the edge of the pot.



Pour cold water in the upper (cover) bowl.



Prepare a paste of bread and water.



Seal the upper bowl to the pot with the paste so that steam does not escape from the pot.



The water in the upper bowl has to be cold all the time, so that the alcohol steam condenses in the pot and drips into the small bowl inside the pot.



As soon as the water in the upper bowl is warm, it must be dipped out.



The upper bowl is refilled with cold water. Repeat these two steps as necessary.



Boil for about an hour, after that, cool the pot and carefully remove the bread paste to unseal the pot.



Take off the upper bowl and remove the small bowl which contains the bowl vodka.

Although the tradition of making moonshine is wrapped in secrecy, research has been done for several years to document the making of moonshine at home. Whether it is called *kandža* or one of the other names for it – *ļerga*, *dzimtenīte*, *samogonka*, *ļurcis* or *brendiņš*, its production at home is cultural and historical, and belongs to the intangible cultural heritage of the world.

Every skill which makes it possible to use available resources is of worth in our modern circumstances. For example, it is useful to know how to make your own spirits, which can be used to make herbal infusions for drinking or for external use.

We invite you to consider this tradition from a different point of view, not moralizing about the making of moonshine as a social evil, but as a way to discover the inexhaustible ingenuity of people to meet their needs in circumstances where resources are limited!



# Moonshine



## What can we make home brew from?

From sugar. Seven, eight kg. Sugar. That's for a 40-litre can of water. One kg. yeast. Some add potatoes. Grate about a kilogram. Makes it more interesting, so to say. Well, and then it was fermented. It turns out, basically – a litre of drink for every kilogram of sugar you use.

## How long is it fermented?

It depends on the temperature. If you have a normal room temperature – about 25 degrees – then it takes about a week. Put it in the corner and let it brew. Then, when it's not sweet any more, it's ready.

## So the week goes by.. What then?

Then? You put it on the stove. Pour it into another can. That one has a lid and a tube. The tube goes through water, with a spiral through the cooling part. Then you heat it over a small flame till it starts steaming out. Then you turn it down real low and let it run out. Well, that process then takes about – I don't really remember – about 4-6 hours. Basically, the longer it runs, the better it is. I've run them through filters, too. Lets say – you run it through several jars – two or three. The füzelis stays in the jars, and then the last jar is crystal clear. It's really strong, about 70%, that. The others are weaker. Then you mix them together. So you get at least 45%, you need that much minimum. 50-45%, then it's good.

## What's that "füzelis"?

Füzelis is what builds up, what's left over. Basically, it's all the garbage what's left from the steam. Füzelis is left in the containers, where the steam drips in, and the biggest part stays in the big can. There's 40 litres in there and only eight comes out, the rest stays in, all that water, the garbage stays.

## Did it come out tasting good?

You know, yes. It turns out best if you put them potatoes in or make it from jams, preserves that're left over from previous years. That's the best quality.

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I remember, I got married in 1960, Pa died after four years, and then you couldn't do it any more. Ma said, "Just a minute! I can make that dzimtenite too!" Then she brewed it too. Brewed it with sugar, 'cause we didn't grow them sugar beets no more. With sugar and bread together. She brewed it in a milk can. She said, "I ain't got the apparatus!" What we had was hauled away to the junk collector's. I just know, Pa died and there was a whole load of them there rings and tubes. An' that was got rid of. Ma said, "I don't need that there metal garbage scattered around here!" I say, "But how you gonna make it?" "Just you wait, when you come over to help me rake up the hay, you'll see that I'll have some made!" So I came once to rake the hay – she kept them cows a long time and we slaved a long time with them. She gives me a bottle. I say, "That ain't straight vodka, you said you was gonna give me somethin' else." "And what's wrong with this? Do I have to run five kilometers to Pāvilsta for vodka?" I say, "How do you get that?" She says, "Why, it's real simple! I put the pot on the stove, pour that ferment in, put in a brick and a bowl on top of that." She put a bowl of cold water on top of the pot, 'cause you have to cool it. She made a sticky paste from rye flour and stuck it on so that nothing could come out. She says, "See? I got everything I need right here!" You understand or not? On top, in the bowl, you got to change the water – not sure how long, all the time it's steaming. And with your finger to check all the time, if it ain't warm. And the vodka's done! Dip it out!

## Tell me what that apparatus looked like!

(She tells us, putting it together from a pot and kitchen bowls).

This here is the most primitive apparatus. This is how my Ma made it, she thought it up herself. She said, "Now them cops can come, they can't take nothin' from me! Are they gonna take pots? And how many time they gonna confiscate pans?" The first time you make some, it won't come out right! 'Cause you gotta get used to every job. You gotta know the timing, it won't work – it'll blow up all over the place! You gotta know how long to to cook the brew to get something. If you take it off too fast, it won't turn out, if you steam it too long, it won't turn out either. You gotta know how long, Ma knew, she'd time it. I don't think it worked for her either at first. She gave me some to taste, I said "Nope! You can't drink that stuff!"

## What did you do when there was no yeast?

There were times when there was no yeast, then you'd put in peas, clabbered milk, boiled potatoes. Boy did it bubble! Like crazy! You mash the potatoes, the green peas you split in half, so it ferments faster.

## What kinds of events was moonshine made for?

Well, when everybody came together to thresh, for weddings, Christmas. You always had beer in the country. Moonshine was made for big events. One or two times a year.

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I've heard of one way – a plastic bag, two bricks, a metal dish, pour the ferment in, put in an electric coil, tie the bag shut at the top, stick the plug in, and it boils. And you pour water over the bag with a shower, cold water, and it steams out and it all accumulates there in the corner, and you just cut it and let it run out! People use their heads! The most important thing is the technology. In Gorbachov's time, they even had washing machines fixed up. Back in those days, electricity didn't hardly cost nothin'.

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On guy was telling me – almost like a joke – about brewing moonshine, that you don't need practically nothin'. Just a shower, a shower stall of some kind, a big plastic bag, an electric coil. You're supposed to put the dish in the bag, the coil in the dish, and hang the plastic bag under the shower. Turn on the coil, it boils the brew, that steams out into the bag, and the cold shower runs over the bag, and the moonshine runs into the bag. Horribly primitive, but they supposedly did it that way.

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Take the quick water pot, but you gotta revise it a little bit and in half an hour, you can make a still. Just need somethin' to pour in it! And in half an hour, you've got moonshine! You put in two dishes, so that they aren't sitting together, you can put a cup between 'em. It condenses, you know, the upper dish has to be smaller and then it runs down the sides into the lower dish. And it's finished, dip it out and down the hatch! No problem! What you can't think up if you put your mind to it! You can't make a whole lot that way, but, for example, I need some for the evening and I want to make it – there it is! You can think up anything, what can't people think up! They laugh that you can squeeze wax out of a turd! Well, but you can! What can't you think up!

(Fragments from interviews around Skrunda, Aizpute, Kazdanga, Pāvilsta, and Nikrace)

## Infusions

### Cranberry extract

2 cups cranberries,  
500 ml moonshine, 500 g sugar.

Crush cranberries, mix with sugar, pour moonshine over, and keep in a closed dish for a week. After that, strain the extract, squeezing out the cranberries.

Use 5-10 drops 3x per day in cases of fever and chills.

### Chestnut blossom extract

50 g dried chestnut blossoms,  
500 ml moonshine.

Pour moonshine over the blossoms and leave to soak for 2 weeks, shaking up from time to time. Strain.

This extract is applied to painful joints and muscles, to minimize the pain of rheumatism and podagra.

### Hawthorne blossom extract

50 g dried hawthorne blossoms,  
500 ml moonshine.

Pour moonshine over blossoms and keep in a dark place a week, shaking up frequently. Strain and press out blossoms.

Use half a teaspoon 2-3 times a day before eating for treating heart and blood vessel sicknesses.

# Soap

There is an often-used saying in Latvian, when someone has done something which has made problems, that he has "boiled soap", but the actual activity of making (boiling) soap at home has almost died out. Talking to people of the older generation, they most often say that soap was boiled in almost every household, but few remember the process of actually making it.



Scoop the ashes out of the stove. The best ash for making soap comes from leafy trees.



Sift the ashes through a sieve.



Pour hot water over the ashes and boil.



The ash lye must be boiled to a concentrated form.



The lye must be strong enough so that a raw egg floats at the top. Let the lye stand so that the solids sink to the bottom. Then pour off the lye.



Pork lard is added to the lye.



### ! Warning !

Boiling ash lye, use rubber gloves! Lye can cause chemical burns, so keep it away from children, and do not leave it where someone could drink it!! Boiling the soap mixture, be careful that it does not splash on your skin or in your eyes!

7.

The lye and lard mixture is boiled, stirring often with a wooden spoon.



Boil until it becomes a mass. The soap is ready when the mixture congeals at the end of the wooden spoon.



9.

The soap mass is poured into vessels and left to dry.